

OCTOBER 15, 1976

PRESIDENT FORD'S NEWS CONFERENCE

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY HAS THESE
THOUGHTS ABOUT THE NEWS CONFERENCE HELD BY PRESIDENT FORD
THURSDAY NIGHT:

VOICE: PRESIDENT FORD'S NEWS CONFERENCE THURSDAY IS BEING SEEN
BY MOST OBSERVERS CHIEFLY IN RELATION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HE HAD BEEN REPEATEDLY ACCUSED BY HIS DEMOCRATIC
OPPONENT, JIMMY CARTER, OF "HIDING" IN THE WHITE HOUSE, AND MANY
PEOPLE SAW MR. FORD'S DECISION TO HOLD THE NEWS CONFERENCE
AS AN ANSWER TO THAT ACCUSATION. THEN, TOO, THE NEWS CONFERENCE
WAS CONCERNED MAINLY WITH ISSUES RELATING TO THE ELECTION:
THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY, MR. FORD'S PERSONAL FINANCES,
GOVERNOR CARTER'S CHARGES OF AMERICAN WEAKNESS, AND THE PRESIDENT'S
RECENT CONTROVERSIAL REMARK ABOUT SOVIET DOMINATION OF EASTERN
EUROPE. MR. FORD ALSO DENIED THAT HIS DECISION THIS WEEK TO
MAKE NEW WEAPONS AVAILABLE TO ISRAEL WAS DICTATED BY POLITICAL
CONSIDERATIONS. AND HE EXPRESSED GRATIFICATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT
SPECIAL PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE HAD CLEARED HIM OF CHARGES OF
IRREGULARITIES IN THE USE OF CAMPAIGN FUNDS. THERE WAS LITTLE
REFERENCE TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND GOVERNOR CARTER'S NEW PROPOSAL
FOR A SOVIET-AMERICAN FREEZE ON NUCLEAR MISSILES CAME TOO LATE
FOR NEWSMEN TO QUESTION THE PRESIDENT ABOUT IT.

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE NEWS CONFERENCE REMAINS TO BE
MEASURED. MR. CARTER, ASKED FOR HIS REACTION, INDICATED THAT
HE THOUGHT THAT THE NEWS CONFERENCE REDOUNDED TO HIS ADVANTAGE,
AND SAID THE PRESIDENT HAD NOT ANSWERED PERTINENT QUESTIONS.
ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME PRESS OBSERVERS THOUGHT MR. FORD SEEMED
RELAXED, ARTICULATE AND WELL-PREPARED TO DEAL WITH THE QUESTIONS

HE WAS ASKED. SINCE THE CONFERENCE WAS NATIONALLY-TELEVISED, THERE WAS SOME THOUGHT THAT MR. CARTER MIGHT ASK FOR EQUAL TIME ON THE TELEVISION NETWORKS, BUT IT IS NOW REPORTED THAT MR. CARTER WILL INSTEAD MEET WITH NEWS REPORTERS OVER THE WEEKEND TO EXPRESS HIS VIEWS AND REACTIONS. IN ANY CASE, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE INSTITUTION OF THE NEWS CONFERENCE, NO LESS THAN THE SET SPEECH OR THE FORMAL DEBATE, CAN BE AN IMPORTANT WAY FOR THE CANDIDATES TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE VOTERS.

MR. FORD DID SAY ONE THING THURSDAY NIGHT WITH WHICH HE MAY WELL FIND WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE TIME HAD COME TO ELEVATE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO THE POINT WHERE IT COULD CONCENTRATE ON "SERIOUS ISSUES" RATHER THAN BEING "Mired IN QUESTIONS THAT HAVE LITTLE BEARING UPON THE FUTURE OF THIS NATION." HE WAS TOUCHING HERE ON ONE OF THE MOST WIDESPREAD CRITICISMS OF THIS CAMPAIGN, AND WITH ELECTION DAY LESS THAN THREE WEEKS OFF MOST AMERICANS WOULD PROBABLY AGREE THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO PAY LESS ATTENTION TO PERSONALITIES AND MORE TO THE BASIC ISSUES.